

## Lessons learned for successful transfer and implementation of better practices in water governance

*Several tools and practices have been applied to help improve water governance. There are, however, many barriers to adopting or transferring better governance practices across countries and basins. Analyses within the Twin2Go project showed that typical reasons for failure include inadequate human and technical resources for implementation, competition or mandate overlap between actors, or loopholes between legal frameworks. New practices and tools may not match existing culture and norms or challenge established organisational interests. The main success precondition for water governance reforms lies in achieving adequate compatibility between the new practices and the pre-existing settings — in particular legal and organisational frameworks, social organisation, and capacities. This policy brief provides lessons learned and recommendations for those who aim to transfer and implement better practices in water governance. It underlines the importance of strategic planning, coordination, stakeholder engagement, and capacity development for successful transfer and implementation.*

### Key Messages

- 1. The existing water governance context, including legal and organisational frameworks (formal and informal), as well as biophysical dimensions of the water resource need to be carefully taken into account when transferring and implementing better practices in water governance.***
- 2. It takes time for new practices to take root and mature. Immediate results from new practices should therefore not be expected.***
- 3. Coordination, stakeholder engagement, capacity building, and communication are important for successful transfer and implementation of better practices.***

### Introduction

Several tools and practices have been applied to help improve the performance of water governance structures: for example, key principles of integrated water resources management have been introduced into legal frameworks, basin organisations have been created, and various assessment and decision-support systems developed. Domestic and international actors thus try to identify better practices (BPs) relevant to them on local, regional and international levels and strive to transfer ideas and practices. As uncertainties related to climate change further complicate the current challenges in water resources management, this also refers to practices and tools aimed at increasing the ability to adapt to climate change (see the box below for examples of governance practices responding to climate change). However, transferring BPs – or, more generally, innovative tools in water governance – from one basin to another and implementing them in different cultural, legal, political or organisational settings often poses significant challenges and does not automatically lead to the desired improvements in water resources management. Twin2Go used a number of workshops



to discuss barriers and opportunities for the transfer and implementation of governance practices and tools with river basin management experts and practitioners from South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and Russia and the New Independent States. Recommendations for the successful transfer and implementation of BPs in water governance have thus been identified based on an analysis of 48 BP examples, discussions and consultations with experts.

Why is it not always possible to directly transfer governance practices from other river basins and countries? How should BPs be adapted to pre-existing contexts and situational specifics? What are the major barriers and constraints to their transfer and adaptation? This policy brief suggests that aspects of strategic planning, coordination, stakeholder engagement and capacity development can help promote the successful transfer and implementation of better practices and innovative tools for water governance.

#### Examples of adaptive approaches to water governance

**Flood monitoring and forecasting, Nizhegorodskay Oblast, Russia:** Forecast results and data compilations on regularly flooded areas enable decision-makers to assess each situation and adapt measures to reduce flood risks.

**Sustainable water management in a changing climate, Thames River, UK:** Assessing climate impacts on each of the actions in the river basin plan is undertaken as a step towards developing a climate adaptation plan for the basin.

**Participatory basin planning, Quarai basin, Brazil:** A Committee allows for the effective participation of water users and citizen representatives in planning and decision-making, and is the preferential place for conflict resolution. Joint development of scenarios has supported widely accepted solutions.

**Basin-wide knowledge system and research network for learning, Okavango Basin, Angola, Namibia, Botswana:** A scientific and technical fact finding and a transboundary diagnostic study involved a network of researchers from riparian states. This network has been maintained and now supports knowledge creation and provides feedback to the policy process.

#### Lessons Learned

##### Adaptation of imported governance practices to the existing context is essential

Caution is necessary with simply transplanting innovative governance practices: the most effective and innovative practices in one system are not necessarily the most useful in another, as socio-ecological processes significantly influence BP effectiveness. The existing political, social, legal and organisational frameworks, availability of data and information, as well as the financial and environmental contexts in the target regions or river basins affect the BP implementation process. These factors can influence how the need for new practices is identified, how implementation is explored, how a BP is transferred, and what outcomes are produced by its application. This can be especially difficult since developing countries and transition economies typically borrow water governance practices from more developed countries in order to speed up reforms in the domestic water sector. In this case, the sometimes significant differences in the socio-political frameworks can result in an inefficient and controversial transfer process.

Apart from the selection and adaptation of governance practices to the existing environmental context, context-specific societal factors – such as the pre-existing governance system and social organisation – are crucial drivers for the successful implementation of innovative water governance practices. An assessment of stakeholder interests and their actual capacities to implement new practices is equally important for strategic planning. These were for example carried out in shared rivers in Africa (Limpopo River Basin, Orange-Senqu River Basin) enabling the countries involved to better understand each other's contexts and to establish a trustworthy and transparent basis for decision-making.

##### Transfer and implementation of better practices needs strategic planning

A well-planned, strategic, and gradual transfer and implementation of BPs in water governance helps to avoid “shock therapy” and possible distortion of the BP; it also helps to reduce transformation costs and implementation gaps. Transition periods are needed for water govern-

ance systems to adapt to new practices and vice versa. Opportunities exist in interim institutions that can be used to gradually develop capacities towards the water governance objectives of the BP. Existing scientific and technical networks can act as drivers of change in this regard. In the Tisza basin in Hungary, for example, the development of a flood management plan included the significant expertise of an informal alliance of experts that had previously assembled gained knowledge on adaptive management approaches through stakeholder platforms before. The time scale and financing of BP implementation and adaptation to the existing context needs to be planned carefully, keeping in mind that no immediate results can be expected from the introduction of new practices in water governance. This could be for example because newly adopted rules or created organisations need time to take root into existing frameworks; in fact full maturity might require many years. An enabling environment and adequate administrative capacities are essential for this maturing process, but in most cases, these will be built and adapted gradually from the existing context.

### **Coordination of multiple actors and active stakeholder engagement increase effectiveness**

Implementing BP in water governance requires the coordination of various actors with multiple interests. A clear division of duties and competencies helps prevent new governance practices leading to competition, overlap of mandates, or loopholes in the existing context. Horizontal coordination, i.e. coordination across sectors, appears to be particularly important, but vertical coordination across different levels of governance, including local, basin, provincial and national, is also necessary to ensure effective implementation. Transfers made at national or river basin levels must be coordinated with local priorities not least because the consent and support of implementers at the local level is a crucial prerequisite for success. Bottom-up approaches can for example help identify the major conflicts and problems on a local level. These may otherwise stop the successful implementation of new governance practices, which are often introduced in a top-down manner.

Moreover, it is important to diversify mechanisms and tools for stakeholder engagement and partnership building. Bottom-up approaches, for instance, use existing community organisations or expert networks for public hearings, forums, and dialogues. Participatory approaches

help to increase public awareness of challenges related to climate change adaptation and may improve the accountability of local authorities by involving water users in decision-making activities. In the Bang Pakong and Prachinburi river basins in Thailand water allocation is carried out through a participatory process that involves establishing water user groups and developing a decision-support system, including negotiation, agreement, monitoring and reporting. The tool helped to reduce conflicts among stakeholders, increased water use efficiency, and paved the way to climate change adaptation by addressing changes in river flow pattern, increasing salt intrusion, floods, and droughts.

### **Introducing better practices needs to be complemented with capacity development for BP implementation and follow-up support**

Existing resources – administrative, human, financial, and technical – provide the organisational foundation on which to implement new practices. Building domestic capacities for water governance thus requires and relies upon investments in these resources. Follow-up support is also needed once the new framework of water governance practices has been implemented, so that its results in terms of adaptive water management can be monitored and, if necessary, further measures can be adjusted.

Aside from being involved in participatory processes at the river basin level, local communities and stakeholders should also be empowered towards the implementation of BP in water governance. This means that local public awareness should be raised towards engagement in decision-making and action. Knowledge on adaptive water governance issues must be disseminated regularly, as well as information on the governance practices to be applied. Self-governance organs, as well as procedures ensuring real representation and participation of stakeholders from various groups of water-users, should be introduced – for instance through river basin organisations (RBOs).

## Recommendations

A range of actors is involved in the transfer and implementation of better practices in water governance, including government agencies, river basin organisations, non-governmental organisations, local communities, international donors, and research organisations. In their efforts to improve water governance in the context of climate change these actors should:

- **Thoroughly assess and consider existing biophysical conditions as well as governance frameworks: powerful actors, existing principles of water resources management, and cultural specifics may impact implementation of better governance practices.**
- **Consider a gradual implementation of new water governance practices – including the time scale and financing – as maturity might require many years.**
- **Ensure horizontal and vertical coordination among those who are directly and indirectly involved in implementing governance practices.**
- **Involve stakeholders at the early stages of better practices transfer and implementation in order to increase ownership and ensure support in all implementation phases.**
- **Complement the transfer and implementation of better practices in water governance with capacity development, information sharing and communication in order to ensure long-term sustainability.**

## Imprint

This policy brief was compiled by adelphi based on *Best Practice Guidelines and Tools for Knowledge Transfer and Implementation of Adaptive Water Governance*, prepared within Twin2Go. The project Twin2Go – Coordinating twinning partnerships towards more adaptive governance in river basins – was designed to review, consolidate, and synthesise research on adaptive and integrated water resources management in basins around the world. Together with experts and stakeholders from these basins, Twin2Go drew insights relevant to policy and research on issues around adaptive water governance in the context of climate change and studied to what extent they are transferable to other basins. Twin2Go was funded as a Coordination Action under the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme from June 2009 until September 2011.

See the download section of the Twin2Go website [www.twin2go.eu](http://www.twin2go.eu) for:

- further information on the examples cited, which can be found in the Best Practice Inventory
- Twin2Go 2011 Project Downloads, including Best Practice Guidelines, Policy Briefs, and River Basin Questionnaires

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